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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request contained in the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 11 June 2015 (S/PRST/2015/12), in which the Council requested me to keep it informed of the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in the Central African subregion since my previous report, dated 25 May 2016 (S/2016/482) and provides an update on progress made in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA and on efforts to implement the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (see S/2012/481).

II. Major developments in the Central African subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. The political landscape of the subregion continued to be dominated by preparations for and the conducting and aftermath of electoral processes, a number of which were marked by serious tensions and violence both before and after the electoral processes were conducted.

3. The fight against Boko Haram, including in the context of the Multinational Joint Task Force, continued during the reporting period. The significant progress achieved by the Joint Task Force notwithstanding, the Boko Haram crisis continued in the Lake Chad basin. In parallel, national, regional and international efforts to combat LRA continued, against a backdrop of the planned withdrawal of Ugandan forces from the African Union Regional Task Force and its likely impact on the strategy to counter LRA.

4. The challenging economic situation in the subregion, owing to the slump in global oil prices and difficulties in diversifying the economy and achieving progress in economic integration, continued to contribute to political and social tensions.

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5. The summit of Heads of State of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community was held in Malabo on 30 July, under the chairmanship of Equatorial Guinea. The summit discussed an economic partnership agreement with the European Union and the economic and security situation in the subregion. The Heads of State decided to make available 4 billion CFA francs (approximately $6.8 million) to the Central African Republic for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programming. The establishment of a steering committee and an office of the president dedicated to economic and financial reforms within the Central African Economic and Monetary Community were proposed in order to assist the community to address the current economic difficulties.

6. To date, four countries in the subregion have developed national action plans to guide in their implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, namely, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda. Women remain underrepresented in the security sector in Central Africa, with only four countries having more than 20 per cent representation by women in the police force, whereas women's representation in the military averages between 2 and 3 per cent for most Central African countries.

7. On 15 November, the Presidents of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon signed, in my presence, a special agreement to submit the long-standing border dispute between their two countries to the International Court of Justice for a peaceful settlement. The signing ceremony was held in Marrakech, Morocco.

8. During the reporting period, my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, Abdoulaye Bathily (Senegal), tendered his resignation, citing personal reasons, effective 31 October. I appointed François Louncény Fall (Guinea) as my Acting Special Representative, effective 1 November.

Political developments and trends

9. In Angola, the seventh ordinary congress of the ruling party Movimento Popular de Libertacão de Angola was held in Luanda from 17 to 20 August, at which the President of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, was re-elected head of the party. At a central committee meeting of the party held on 23 August, the former Minister of Defence, João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, was chosen as the vice-president of the party, replacing Roberto de Almeida. The voter registration process for the presidential election began on 25 August and will continue through 31 March 2017.

10. In Cameroon, following the changes to the cabinet made in October 2015, plans to hold elections early appear to have been put on hold even after the detention, earlier in 2016, of opposition leaders, party followers and journalists who criticized the proposed constitutional amendments that could have paved the way for holding the presidential election early. The Government is initiating an assessment of recovery and peacebuilding in the Extrême Nord region, with the support of the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union, in order to adequately respond to the humanitarian, recovery and development aspects of the Boko Haram crisis.

11. The ninth meeting of the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic was held in Bangui on 25 August. Participants included representatives of the Economic Community of Central African States and the Governments of Angola, Chad and the Congo. Among the points discussed at the meeting were the steps taken by the Government of the Central African Republic regarding security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, the announcement that the States members of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community had each agreed to train one battalion of the armed forces of the Central African Republic, the need for dialogue with armed groups and the decision to transform the International Contact Group, co-chaired by the African Union and the Congo on behalf of the Economic Community of Central African States, into an International Support Group co-chaired by the African Union and the United Nations and tasked with coordinating reconstruction efforts in the country. In October, a renewed bout of intercommunal violence in the country resulted in the death of dozens of civilians. Violence was also directed towards the United Nations. On 24 October, four peacekeepers were among those injured during a large-scale protest against the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the Government, at which at least four civilians died.

12. On 8 August, the President of Chad, Idriss Déby Itno, was sworn in for a fifth term of office, amid opposition protests regarding the results of the presidential election held on 10 April. Clashes between the opposition and security forces resulted in one death. On 26 July, 31 opposition parties had created a coalition known as the Front de l'opposition nouvelle pour l'alternance et le changement, which had called upon the people of Chad to unite and protest the new term of office of the President. It subsequently issued a declaration calling for dialogue with the Government under the auspices of international partners, while also emphasizing its intention to call for large-scale action. In response, the Coordination des partis politiques pour la défense de la constitution, an older coalition, decided to expel members who had joined the Front de l'opposition nouvelle.

13. On 14 August, the Prime Minister of Chad, Albert Pahimi Padacké, who had been reappointed by the President on 9 August, announced the new members of his government, comprising 38 members, including seven women. On 26 August, the parliament adopted a five-year political programme presented by the Prime Minister.

14. In the Congo, a former presidential candidate in the 20 March election, Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko, was arrested on 14 June and charged with attempting to undermine State security and with illegal possession of weapons, on 16 June. He was indicted on a new charge, disturbance of public order, on 17 August. Requests for his provisional release have been denied. On 25 July, the President of the opposition party Unis pour le Congo, Paulin Makaya, was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for incitement to engage in disorderly conduct, after having organized an unauthorized demonstration in October 2015 in protest against the constitutional referendum. During a press conference on 29 July, former presidential candidate and opposition leader Guy-Brice Parfait Kolélas called for dialogue under the auspices of the international community and for a presidential pardon of Mr. Mokoko. In early October, the Prime Minister and the Mayor of Brazzaville initiated the

colloquium on the theme "Vivre ensemble", which brought together political protagonists with the aim of adopting recommendations for addressing political grievances for the President's consideration.

15. According to a board of inquiry report submitted on 31 August to the Ministry of Justice of the Congo, the attacks that took place in Brazzaville on 4 April, the same day that the Constitutional Court validated the final results of the presidential election, were the responsibility of the "Ninja" combatants operating under the command of former rebel leader Frédéric Bintsamou, also known as "Pastor Ntumi". The strong response by national security forces to apprehend Mr. Bintsamou notwithstanding, his whereabouts remain unknown. In September, several attacks against security forces, local officials, civilians and humanitarian workers occurred in the Pool region, and they were reportedly perpetrated by suspected "Ninja" combatants. The numbers of those killed and injured remains unconfirmed. A low-intensity conflict has continued in the region.

16. The President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, named the 36 ministers of his new government on 22 June, following his re-election on 24 April. His eldest son, Teodorin Nguema Obiang Mangue, was promoted to Vice-President, in charge of defense and security, and his other son, Gabriel Mbega Obiang Lima, retained his position of Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons. In total, eight newly appointed ministers, including three women, joined the government.

17. In Gabon, the presidential election was held on 27 August with the participation of regional and international observers. On 31 August, the Minister of the Interior announced the provisional results, in which the incumbent President, Ali Bongo Ondimba, garnered 49.8 per cent of the votes, securing his re-election, whereas the main opposition candidate Jean Ping came a close second, with 48.23 per cent of the votes. Mr. Ping rejected the results and, in the evening on the same day, his supporters clashed with security forces in Libreville and other towns. A number of businesses were looted and the buildings of State institutions, such as the National Assembly, were set ablaze. On 1 September, security forces raided Mr. Ping's campaign headquarters, where a number of opposition leaders and civil society activists were located, and they were subsequently held in de facto detention until 2 September. Internet services, text messaging and social media websites and applications were interrupted for about four weeks. As a result of the unrest, it was reported that three people were killed, an undetermined number of people were injured and more than 800 people were arrested. According to the National Prosecutor, 70 people remained in custody as at early October, including 31 people charged with flagrant acts of violence and 39 people placed in preventive detention for deliberate arson, destruction of public and private property, and looting.

18. On 5 September, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights, who also served as the Second Deputy Prime Minister, resigned from both the government and the ruling party in protest over the disputed presidential election. He called for a recount of the votes by polling station. On the same day, the Chairperson of the African Union, Mr. Déby Itno, announced that a high-level delegation composed of African Heads of State, accompanied by senior officials of the African Union Commission and of the United Nations, would be dispatched to Libreville to meet with stakeholders to defuse tensions. On 8 September, however, the Minister for

Foreign Affairs of Gabon announced the postponement of the planned visit, citing competing commitments in the agendas of the leaders.

19. On 8 September, Mr. Ping filed an appeal before the Constitutional Court for a recount of the votes from each polling station in Haut-Ogooué province, where Mr. Bongo Ondimba had won 95.46 per cent of the votes, with a participation rate of 99.93 per cent, according to the provisional results. Mr. Ping requested equal participation of representatives of his camp and that of Mr. Bongo Ondimba, as well as observers from the international community, during the Court's deliberations. Two other independent candidates also submitted appeals before the Constitutional Court. On 15 September, the legal team of Mr. Bongo Ondimba presented its counter-appeal case before the Court, rejecting the presence of international experts but agreeing to a recount of the votes from each polling station in the contested province.

20. On 24 September, the Constitutional Court upheld Mr. Bongo Ondimba's re-election victory and partially modified the vote count of the election, the final results of which were 50.66 per cent of the votes for the incumbent President and 47.24 per cent for Mr. Ping. It also amended the voter participation rate to 57.35 per cent. No security incidents were reported in Libreville or other major towns following the Court's announcement of the final results. Shortly after the ruling, the President reiterated his intention to create conditions for political dialogue and called upon all political stakeholders to work with him for the greater good of the nation. The same day, Mr. Ping deplored the "flawed justice", accused the Court of bias and vowed not to retreat. The President was sworn in for a second seven-year term of office on 27 September.

21. On 28 September, the President appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs, Emmanuel Issoze Ngondet, as Prime Minister and tasked him with forming an inclusive government, the composition of which was announced on 2 October. Although three lesser opposition party members, including a former presidential candidate, joined the cabinet, it does not include prominent allies of Mr. Ping. Several young ministers and twelve women were appointed, raising the representation of women to 30 per cent of the cabinet. A new ministry dedicated to political dialogue was created. To date, Mr. Ping continues to reject the President's invitation to dialogue. Tensions continue to be high in the country, resulting in the limited activity of most public schools and universities since the official beginning of the academic year on 31 October.

22. In Sao Tome and Principe, the presidential election took place in a peaceful environment on 17 July. According to the provisional results released by the electoral commission on 18 July, the candidate of Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada's party Acção Democrática Independente, Evaristo Carvalho, received 50.1 per cent of the votes, whereas the incumbent President, Manuel Pinto da Costa, received 24.8 per cent of the votes. On 21 July, however, the Supreme Court invalidated the provisional results on the grounds that the electoral commission should have waited to announce the results until the completion of the tally of votes cast in the district of Maria Louise, which voted on 20 July, and by voters in the diaspora. Mr. Pinto da Costa and the third-place candidate, Maria das Neves, submitted a complaint requesting the invalidation of the election, the organization of new elections and the resignation of the president of the electoral commission.

23. The Constitutional Court subsequently ordered that a second round take place on 7 August, with the participation of Mr. Carvalho and Mr. Pinto da Costa. The latter, however, boycotted the second round, arguing that his participation would sanction what he described as illegal acts during the electoral period that the Court had not addressed. The second round went forward as scheduled with only the participation of Mr. Carvalho, who was officially declared the victor on 19 August. He was sworn in as President on 3 September.

Boko Haram

24. Violent attacks and suicide bombings by Boko Haram militants continued, including hostage-taking, cattle raiding and raids on villages. There was a resurgence of violence in the Extrême Nord region of Cameroon, including on 21 August in Mora, the headquarters of sector 1 of the Multinational Joint Task Force. On 21 November, Boko Haram conducted three attacks in northern Cameroon, including in Darak, where six Cameroonian soldiers were killed. Suicide bombings continued to serve as the group's modus operandi, with mosques, local markets and other crowded public spaces targeted. Since July 2015, there have been over 40 suicide bombings in Cameroon.

25. In Chad, Boko Haram attacks continued to affect transborder trade and the livelihoods of the local population. On 14 August, two attacks occurred around the area of Kaiga Kinjira, near the Nigerian border, followed by another in the same area on 26 August. During the reporting period, some 850 people, mostly women and children, reportedly associated with Boko Haram, surrendered to the Multinational Joint Task Force in Chad. This brings the total number of defectors in the past few months to about 1,500. The Chadian authorities have called for international assistance with regard to the reintegration of Boko Haram defectors and their families.

26. A schism in the Boko Haram leadership was noted during the reporting period. Abu Musab al-Barnawi was declared the new leader of the group by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daesh. The formerly recognized leader, Abubakar Shekau, continued to assert his authority, while maintaining his allegiance to ISIL. The schism was reportedly owing to the fact that he had failed to adhere to guidance from ISIL leadership, including a directive to stop using children as suicide bombers.

27. Multinational Joint Task Force operations continued to target Boko Haram elements in the Lake Chad basin. In particular, the large-scale Operation Gama Aiki was launched in June with the goal of eradicating Boko Haram. On 8 July, the chiefs of defence staff of the four affected countries and the Force Commander of the Joint Task Force met in Diffa, the Niger, to take stock of ongoing military operations.

28. Children, especially young girls, are particularly vulnerable to the insecurity generated in the broader context of the Boko Haram threat. Children are at risk of being abducted and forcibly recruited by Boko Haram, including as suicide bombers. For the most part, boys are kidnapped to join Boko Haram as fighters, and women and girls are abducted primarily for sexual abuse, forced marriages and labour.

Lord's Resistance Army

29. LRA remains a persistent threat to civilians, in particular in eastern Central African Republic and in areas with little to no security presence. One LRA group has also been present in Garamba National Park, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but the bulk of LRA activities in that country during the reporting period occurred in areas bordering the Central African Republic. This suggests that the LRA elements involved in poaching activities in Garamba National Park in recent months had crossed or intended to cross the border. According to defectors, LRA continues to kidnap civilians, including children, and the group intends to abduct young boys and force them into military training.

30. A significant number of LRA-related incidents were noted in the Central African Republic. This was owing to an increase in activities of the Doctor Achaye group, which was responsible for five incidents in August, including an attack on a Ugandan patrol near the village of Kitessa, and the possible movement of LRA elements in Haute-Kotto prefecture towards Kafia Kingi. Incidents of looting involving LRA elements continued, including the 20 August attack on the mining site of Yangou Waka, located near Sam Ouandja.

31. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, LRA elements continued ambushing civilians travelling along key axes within the Dungu and Niangara territories in northeastern Haut-Uélé province, as well as in Ango and Bondo territories, located in north-western Bas-Uélé province at the border with the Central African Republic. LRA-related incidents included ambushes, lootings, the abduction of civilians, who were often forced to transport items, and armed attacks on security forces.

32. Uganda expressed its intention to withdraw its forces operating in the Central African Republic under the auspices of the African Union Regional Task Force by September, but subsequently decided to postpone the withdrawal until 31 December.

33. On 23 August, the Government of the United States of America imposed economic sanctions on two sons of Joseph Kony, Salim and Ali Kony, citing their activities on behalf of their father and LRA. The action freezes any assets held by the two individuals within the United States.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

34. Since my previous report, about 20 incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea have been reported by the International Maritime Organization.

35. From 9 to 12 August, experts from the States members of the Maritime Organization for West and Central Africa met in Lomé to discuss issues linked to maritime security, in advance of the extraordinary summit of the African Union on maritime security and development in Africa, also held in Lomé, on 15 October. The African Union Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development was adopted at that summit.

Poaching and the illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources

36. On 6 July, in Makoua, the Congo, two traffickers were arrested while trying to sell eight elephant tusks representing 13 kg of ivory. They were sentenced to three

years' imprisonment and fined $3,400. On 9 July, in Franceville, Gabon, two traffickers were arrested while attempting to sell four elephant tusks representing 23 kg of ivory.

37. The regularity of ivory seizures in Central Africa notwithstanding, little progress has been made to dismantle the trafficking networks. Few poachers are caught or prosecuted. Differences and loopholes in national legal frameworks, institutional weaknesses, corruption, the limitations of criminal justice systems and porous borders are exploited by criminal networks, which are also involved in the trafficking of arms, drugs and humans, fuelling further insecurity in the region.

B. Humanitarian developments

38. Violence and conflict across the Lake Chad basin, in the Central African Republic and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continue to be the main drivers of human suffering in the subregion. Around 2.6 million people have been displaced as a result of Boko Haram attacks and military counter-offensives in the broader region. The crisis has left 6.3 million people severely food insecure, with pockets of famine conditions reported in certain locations. The United Nations has also received reports of an increase in the number of incidents of sexual and gender-based violence among the displaced persons.

39. In Cameroon, security in the Extrême Nord region remains unstable. Cross-border raids and suicide bombings by Boko Haram continue to cause deaths and poverty. The Extrême Nord region is host to 72,846 Nigerian refugees. The use of improvised explosive devices by Boko Haram restricts humanitarian access to the internally displaced persons, refugees and host communities. In its eastern region, Cameroon hosts around 260,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, many settling within local communities.

40. In certain areas of the western Lac region of Chad, attacks attributed to Boko Haram and large military operations against the armed group are hampering humanitarian operations and causing new population displacements. Trends show increases in the use of improvised explosive devices and in attacks on villages for the purpose of looting food and livestock. As a result, several humanitarian partners have suspended operations in the health, nutrition and food security sectors. Currently, there are more than 126,000 displaced people, including 109,000 internally displaced persons, 7,900 refugees, 11,000 returnees and 320 third-country nationals. Malnutrition rates continue to be above the emergency threshold in many districts across the Sahel region in Chad. Poor pastoral conditions have decreased livestock prices, reduced pastoralists' revenue and terms of trade and created food consumption deficits. Chad continues to host some 300,000 Sudanese refugees in the east and 69,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the south.

41. Following a lull in violence during the presidential election period in the Central African Republic, at the end of 2015 and early in 2016, hostilities flared up once again in April and in October, including in Bangui, forcing tens of thousands of civilians to flee for safety — 40,000 in the first half of October alone. Around 410,000 Central Africans remain internally displaced and close to 453,000 are refugees in neighbouring countries. Insecurity in many areas has been the main

impediment to voluntary returns by refugees and internally displaced persons. Across the country, some 2.3 million people, or half the population, require humanitarian assistance. Public and social services are extremely limited or non-existent, with humanitarian organizations providing much of the basic services to the population. Fifty per cent of the rural population is food insecure, with nearly 30 per cent experiencing crisis levels of hunger requiring immediate assistance. Attacks against humanitarian actors have been increasing, seriously undermining the delivery of assistance to those most in need.

42. The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remained highly challenging, in particular in the east. Continued armed group activity and a reported increase in intercommunal tensions contributed to the displacement of 367,000 people in the first half of 2016 alone, with 1.7 million people currently displaced. The eastern provinces also host the majority of the refugee arrivals from neighbouring countries, a total of 388,000 people originating mainly from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan. Moreover, during the period under review, a yellow fever epidemic spread to 7 of the country's 26 provinces. A cholera epidemic continued to worsen in the first half of 2016, with the disease spreading from regions in the east in which cholera is endemic towards Kinshasa along the Congo River.

C. Human rights trends

43. The human rights situation in the subregion continued to be of concern during the reporting period, with diverse forms of violations of fundamental freedoms in some countries, mainly targeting political opponents and demonstrators, civil society organizations, human rights defenders and members of the media. The situation reveals the trend of continued narrowing of the democratic space having a negative impact on non-State activities and electoral processes. Violations of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and access to information have included arbitrary arrests and detention, harassment and intimidation of journalists, as well as targeted attacks on media outlets. Service shutdowns and other restrictions have also been used as measures limiting freedom of expression and effective political participation, including in Burundi, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon.

44. In Gabon, the presidential election was followed by violent unrest in Libreville and elsewhere in the country. The reports of excessive use of force by security forces are a matter of concern. On 29 September, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court issued a statement acknowledging receipt of a referral from the Government of Gabon to open an investigation without delay regarding the situation in the country. The statement indicated that the Court would conduct a preliminary examination to establish whether the criteria for opening an investigation had been met.

45. In Chad, on 24 August, a court in N'Djamena closed the case pertaining to soldiers who reportedly disappeared after voting against the President during the recent presidential election. The Prosecutor stated that all the individuals in question were subsequently found and presented to the court and police in the course of the investigation that had been launched. On 22 September, the United Nations High

Commissioner for Human Rights and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Chad signed a host country agreement for the opening of a country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Chad.

46. In the Central African Republic, MINUSCA documented 455 new verified incidents of violations or abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law committed against 1,257 victims, including 92 women, 47 boys and 14 girls. The violations included arbitrary killings, cruel and inhuman treatment, conflict-related sexual violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as abductions.

47. Although the security situation returned largely to normal after the post-electoral political tensions in the Congo earlier in the year, the human rights climate remained fragile, highlighting an acute need for legal and institutional reforms, including of the National Human Rights Commission and the committees charged with reporting to treaty bodies. The Government extended its full cooperation to an OHCHR mission deployed to the country from 13 June to 25 July to assess the human rights situation during the period from the holding of the constitutional referendum in October 2015 to the post-electoral crisis that followed the presidential election of 20 March 2016 and to formulate recommendations to the Government for addressing remaining issues and challenges.

48. A new criminal justice code was promulgated in Cameroon in July, sparking controversy among some sectors. The revised Penal Code retains the death penalty and the criminalization of homosexuality and includes provisions for criminal penalties for unpaid rent and extramarital affairs. It also contains new provisions that protect the rights of women and girls, in particular with regard to the custody of minors and issues related to female genital mutilation, rape and sexual harassment.

D. Socioeconomic trends

49. Several Member States in Central Africa continued to experience the consequences of low commodity prices, increased security costs and insufficient regional integration, which represent a serious threat to the socioeconomic stability of the region. Declining public spending, including through the adoption of austerity measures, has heightened social tensions in several countries. For example, on 31 August, the Government of Chad adopted austerity measures to increase resources and curb public spending, which included reductions in social benefits and allowances and the restructuring of State institutions. As a result, labour unions and students launched an indefinite strike, rejecting the unilateral nature of the measures imposed and accusing the Government of mismanaging oil resources.

50. On 12 July, the Bank of Central African States announced its average growth rate forecast for 2016 for the Central African Economic and Monetary Community area at 1.7 per cent, down from 2.5 per cent in 2015. The average fiscal deficit forecast for 2016 for the area increased to 7.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), from 3.5 per cent in 2015. On 12 July, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund announced a 1.9 per cent average growth rate forecast for 2016 for the area. It noted that average external public debt had increased, from 13.1 per cent of GDP in 2012 to an estimated 25.6 per cent for 2016, and called for ensuring debt sustainability. The Executive Board encouraged States members of the

Economic and Monetary Community to focus on fiscal consolidation and structural reforms, including improving the business climate and boosting private investment, and moving the regional integration agenda forward.

51. In order to strengthen its recovery efforts, the Central African Republic, with the support of the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union, organized a conference on the country's recovery and peacebuilding plan in Brussels on 17 November.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

52. My Special Representative for Central Africa continued to be actively engaged in the subregion in promoting regional peace and security and preventing conflict, including by undertaking a number of country-specific visits. From 20 to 23 July, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs visited Chad, the Congo and Gabon to discuss national and regional political challenges with various stakeholders. On 21 July, he inaugurated the new UNOCA premises in Libreville.

Central African Republic

53. On 25 August, in Bangui, my Special Representative, in his capacity as the United Nations representative in the international mediation on the crisis in the Central African Republic, attended the ninth meeting of the International Contact Group on the Central African Republic. In his meetings with the Heads of State of the Economic Community of Central African States, he urged for continued engagement by States of the region in consolidating peace in the Central African Republic.

Chad

54. On 7 and 8 June, my Special Representative travelled to Chad where he met with the President of Chad and opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo. He stressed the need for inclusive dialogue, in particular on issues related to political and electoral governance in the run-up to the legislative elections. On 8 August, my Special Representative attended the swearing-in ceremony of the President.

Gabon

55. My Special Representative held intensive engagements with key national stakeholders and regional and international partners to address the electoral crisis in Gabon. He met with the candidates for president, the incumbent, Mr. Bongo Ondimba, and Mr. Ping, as well as their allies and advisers, on several occasions to call for restraint and advocate for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. I also spoke with Mr. Bongo Ondimba and Mr. Ping on 30 August and 4 September to reiterate the importance of avoiding any further escalation of violence. In addition, my Special Representative discussed the situation in Gabon with regional leaders,

namely, the President of the Congo, Denis Sassou Nguesso, in Brazzaville on 14 September, and the President of Chad, in N'Djamena on 16 September.

56. My Special Representative played a key role in defusing post-electoral tensions, in particular regarding the release, on 2 September, of 27 opposition members, who were held at Mr. Ping's campaign headquarters. He repeatedly called for the adjudication of electoral complaints through established legal channels in a transparent, fair and credible manner. He worked closely with the Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, who travelled to Libreville, and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie and the Secretary-General of the Economic Community of Central African States to help defuse rising tensions. He also held regular consultations with the President of the Constitutional Court of Gabon to encourage her to preserve the credibility of the appeal process, in particular by making public announcements on the Court's regulations and procedures.

Congo

57. From 30 May to 1 June, my Special Representative travelled to the Congo to assess the situation and to call for a reduction of the tensions stemming from the 20 March presidential election. He met with the President of the Congo, presidential advisers and opposition leaders Mr. Kolélas and Mr. Mokoko. He also visited the Pool region, the theatre of security operations against Pastor Ntumi, in the aftermath of the presidential election. On 26 June and 1 August, he met with the President in Oyo and Brazzaville, respectively. During his visits, he called for an inclusive dialogue and confidence-building measures to chart a peaceful political course in the run-up to the legislative elections to be held in July 2017. He also discussed regional issues.

Rwanda

58. On 25 June 2016, my Special Representative travelled to Rwanda where he met with the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo, to discuss regional issues, including Rwanda's return to the Economic Community of Central African States and its possible role in fostering peace, security and stability in Central Africa.

Sao Tome and Principe

59. On 4 and 5 August, my Special Representative travelled to Sao Tome and Principe in the run-up to the second round of the presidential election, held on 7 August. He met with the Prime Minister and the presidential candidates. During his visit, my Special Representative called upon political stakeholders to preserve the peaceful nature of the country's competitive politics.

60. A representative from UNOCA also travelled to Sao Tome and Principe during the first and second rounds of the presidential election from 13 to 20 July and from 4 to 10 August, respectively. He met with the presidential candidates, the electoral commission, security officials, civil society organizations and the Head of the African Union electoral observation mission, the former President of Mozambique, Armando Emilio Guebuza. Whereas political stakeholders noted the professionalism

of the electoral commission, they stressed the need to transform it into a permanent body.

Elections

61. UNOCA worked closely with partners to follow up on the recommendations of the workshop held in Douala, Cameroon, in May 2015 on the role of the media in the conduct and promotion of peaceful electoral processes. In this regard, UNOCA, in cooperation with the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), organized a workshop in Sao Tome and Principe, held on 25 and 26 May. Participants included journalists and representatives of the National Electoral Commission and the Media High Council. Participants called for assistance to develop a code of ethics and professional conduct for journalists.

62. UNOCA organized a workshop, held in Libreville from 7 to 10 June, on supporting the electoral process by strengthening freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. A key outcome of the workshop was the endorsement of the code of good conduct for the media and journalists of Central Africa during elections, which had been adopted in Douala, Cameroon, in May 2015. At the request of the Gabonese authorities, UNOCA and other United Nations entities, including UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, as well as the International Organization of la Francophonie, supported the organization of similar workshops in Gabon, held in Port-Gentil from 15 to 17 June 2016, Franceville from 22 to 24 June and Oyem from 28 to 30 June.

B. Support to United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

63. In its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA worked closely with the Chair of the Committee (Central African Republic) to implement the recommendations of the forty-second ministerial meeting, held in Bangui from 6 to 10 June, including the need for States to ratify the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly and to sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to be held in Sao Tome and Principe from 28 November to 2 December.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

64. On 12 August, UNOCA, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the European Union and the United States issued a joint declaration on the election in Gabon, calling upon all stakeholders to ensure the democratic and peaceful

character of the election, prioritize dialogue, refrain from any incitement to violence and ensure respect for human rights.

65. During the electoral crisis in Gabon, the United Nations and the African Union worked jointly in the implementation of confidence-building measures between the Government and the opposition, including releasing detainees, avoiding inflammatory statements and restoring telecommunications services. As agreed with the Government, UNOCA worked with the African Union for the deployment of a high-level delegation of the African Union, which was subsequently postponed indefinitely. The readiness of regional leaders to engage in the resolution of the post-electoral tensions, however, had provided momentum for the facilitation of the by the two organizations.

66. From 13 to 15 June, UNOCA participated in a workshop of the Economic Community of Central African States, held in Yaoundé, regarding the planned revision of texts that govern the functioning of the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa. UNOCA and the Economic Community of Central African States also worked closely on the organization of the activities mentioned in paragraphs 67 and 70, below, on mediation and regional integration.

Mediation

67. From 26 to 27 July, UNOCA, in partnership with the Mediator of the Gabonese Republic and the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States, hosted a conference of mediators and ombudsmen of Central Africa in Libreville. The mediators of Gabon and Chad, the ombudsman of Burundi and the Deputy Defender of the People of Equatorial Guinea attended the conference. The imam of Bangui and the president of the Evangelical Alliance of the Central African Republic attended as special guests. Other participants included the First Vice-President of the Senate of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Deputy Public Protector of South Africa and a representative of the mediator of Senegal, in his capacity as Chair of the Association of Mediators of Member Countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union. Participants adopted a declaration on the creation of an association of mediators of States members of the Economic Community of Central African States. A road map to that end is being developed, and a steering committee was established, including representatives of the mediators of Central African States present during the conference, the secretariat of the Economic Community, UNOCA and the Association of Mediators of the Economic and Monetary Union.

Boko Haram

68. UNOCA organized a visit of experts from Member States constituting the Bureau of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe) to Cameroon and Chad from 31 October to 4 November. The experts met with the relevant authorities of both countries to discuss the impact of Boko Haram and visited the town of Kousséri, Cameroon, and the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force in N'Djamena.

Regional integration

69. On 30 July, my Special Representative attended the opening of the extraordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community held in Malabo. In his address to the Conference, he expressed concern over the political and social impact of the continued decrease in global oil prices on member States of the Economic and Monetary Community. He reiterated his appeal for increased economic diversification and regional integration and improved management of resources.

70. UNOCA and the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States co-organized a round table meeting on regional integration in Central Africa, held in Yaoundé on 18 and 19 October. It was attended by relevant ministers and senior government officials from States members of the Economic Community, subregional institutions, experts and development partners. Participants explored ways to relaunch the regional integration process in the subregion, in the light of current challenges.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

71. On 22 July, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs visited the headquarters of the Regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa in Pointe-Noire, the Congo, where he received a briefing on the progress achieved by the Centre and the challenges facing its full operationalization. The Senior Military Adviser to UNOCA also visited the headquarters of the Regional Coordination Centre, from 25 to 27 May, to discuss matters related to the Centre's operationalization.

72. During its visit to Cameroon to discuss Boko Haram, the Bureau of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa also visited the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

73. The United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa continued to implement its three-year project on enhancing physical security and stockpile management in selected countries of the Sahel region, including Chad. The Regional Centre co-organized, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chad and the country's focal point on small arms and light weapons, national consultations on the subject, held on 27 and 28 June, which also served to initiate the identification of pilot stockpile sites for rehabilitation. The event brought together 18 representatives of relevant national agencies in Chad that are involved in the field of security regarding small arms and light weapons. It helped to raise awareness about the importance of adopting national legislation and procedures relating to the security, control and management of small arms and light weapons in order to minimize and prevent the risk of accidents and the diversion of arms to non-State actors.

74. On 4 and 5 August, in Abuja, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, in collaboration with the Commission of the Economic

Community of West African States, held an expert meeting on improving cross-border subregional cooperation in the control of small arms and light weapons under existing regional and subregional instruments. The meeting took place within the framework of the Regional Centre's project on strengthening the capacity of Lake Chad basin countries to implement Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) by preventing the acquisition of arms and ammunition by terrorist groups. The meeting convened more than 30 representatives of the four beneficiary countries and relevant international, regional and subregional organizations and institutions.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army

Operationalization of the African Union Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army

75. From 9 to 13 August, representatives of UNOCA, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the African Union undertook an assessment mission to Obo and Bria in eastern Central African Republic. They met with a wide variety of stakeholders who underlined the growing number of LRA attacks and abductions in the area and the risk that both LRA and ex-Séléka groups would strengthen their capacity following the withdrawal of the Ugandan forces operating under the African Union Regional Task Force. Humanitarian needs in the area were also a key topic of discussion.

76. From 24 to 28 October, representatives of UNOCA and the African Union undertook an assessment mission to Dungu in northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The mission noted that LRA remained a serious threat to local communities there, even though the capacity of the group had been reduced.

77. Pursuant to the conclusions of the fifth ministerial meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army, held in Addis Ababa on 19 and 20 May, which were endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on 30 May, the Commission of the African Union conducted a joint technical assessment mission to LRA-affected areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, from 20 to 25 June. The aim of the mission was to assess, among other things, the impact of Uganda's announced withdrawal of its contingent from the African Union Regional Task Force by September 2016. The European Union, the United States, the African Union, including the Force Commander of the Regional Task Force, and the United Nations Office to the African Union took part in the assessment mission. It established that, although considerable progress had been made in degrading the capacities of LRA, the group remained an active threat in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. The presence of other armed groups in the region, including the ex-Séléka faction and the Janjaweed militia, further complicated the campaign to eliminate LRA.

78. The assessment of the mission was that the possible non-renewal of the mandate of United States special forces, which ended on 31 October, would deprive the African Union Regional Task Force of its main provider of logistical support.

The situation would be exacerbated by the withdrawal of Ugandan forces from the Task Force. Since then, the mandate of the special forces has been renewed until early 2017.

Protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance

79. Through Operation Red Kite, MONUSCO provided logistical support to the offensive against LRA that was successfully launched by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including its contingent operating under the African Union Regional Task Force, which is assisted by the United States military.

80. MONUSCO, jointly with the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, intensified patrols in the LRA-affected areas of Dungu territory, in particular Badolo, Nambia and Nagero. MONUSCO and MINUSCA have also intensified their information exchanges on LRA-related issues.

81. Within the framework of the implementation of the early warning system, the secured, empowered, connected communities project, implemented by Catholic Relief Services and supported by the Government of the United States, five high-frequency radios were installed in the area around Bangadi and in Kapili.

Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration

82. The MONUSCO transit camp in Dungu accommodated 27 LRA dependents, comprising 10 Congolese nationals, 8 Ugandan nationals, 5 Central African nationals and 4 South Sudanese nationals. All of them were repatriated by MONUSCO, with the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross, to their home countries or reunited with their families in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Long-term development and peacebuilding support

83. Stabilization and recovery efforts in LRA-affected areas remain seriously underfunded and mostly unaddressed. State authorities and humanitarian and development actors, including United Nations entities, are largely absent.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

84. The Regional Policy Adviser for West and Central Africa of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), who is based in Dakar, visited Libreville on 25 and 26 July to discuss cooperation with UNOCA and the Economic Community of Central African States in supporting regional initiatives in the area of women and peace and security. A number of initiatives were identified, including joint support to the Economic Community to create a women's peace network in Central Africa.

IV. Observations and recommendations

85. In the context of the continued political tensions in the subregion linked to the conduct and aftermath of a number of electoral processes, I call upon all stakeholders to resolve their differences in a peaceful manner, including through inclusive dialogue and mediation, and in conformity with existing legal frameworks. The peaceful holding of elections is the shared responsibility of all political leaders. I welcome the key role played by international and regional observers and stress the importance of the free and responsible participation of the media. I call upon the Governments concerned to ensure that elections and the follow-up to them, including appeals of official results, are conducted in a transparent manner to guarantee the credibility of electoral processes. I urge the Governments concerned to ensure that internal security measures and/or operations are conducted in conformity with international human rights law. My Special Representative will continue to carry out his good offices role and engage in preventive diplomacy with all relevant stakeholders.

86. I welcome the signing on 15 November of the special agreement by the Presidents of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon for the submission of their border dispute to the International Court of Justice. This marks a historic milestone and the successful conclusion of the United Nations mediation process. I hope that the settlement of this long-standing border dispute will be a source of inspiration for other countries facing similar challenges and a step forward for the further enhancement of bilateral relations between the two countries.

87. I am heartened by the efforts in the region in the fight against Boko Haram, which have resulted in substantial military successes. At the same time, the terrorist group remains a serious threat to regional peace and security, and its activities continue to inflict a devastating toll on the political, socioeconomic, humanitarian and human rights situation in the affected areas. I call upon all the Governments concerned to stay the course and further scale up their efforts, in full conformity with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, to address both the immediate manifestations of the Boko Haram violence and the root causes of the crisis. In equal measure, I urge the international community to redouble its support to the region in the fight against Boko Haram, including the vital humanitarian and early recovery assistance and the requisite political, logistical and financial support to the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. I encourage the Economic Community of Central African States and the Economic Community of West African States to hold, without further delay, the planned summit of Heads of State on Boko Haram with the aim of developing a regional strategy to address the Boko Haram crisis, in particular the root causes that have contributed to the emergence and endurance of the group. UNOCA and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) stand ready to support the two subregional organizations in this regard.

88. I am encouraged by the progress made in the implementation of the maritime security strategy, including efforts to operationalize the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea. I renew my call upon regional States and international partners to provide the resources necessary for the Centre's full functioning. UNOCA, in collaboration with UNOWAS, will

continue to provide assistance and mobilize support in combating maritime insecurity. I welcome the adoption of the African Union Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development.

89. I remain concerned by the phenomenon of poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking and its negative impact on the environmental, governance and security situation in the subregion, including the continuing links between illicit wildlife trade and armed groups. I renew my call upon Governments in the subregion to take definite steps towards the implementation of the specific measures needed to operationalize the strategic decisions on countering illicit wildlife trade, including those contained in General Assembly resolution 69/314 and the African Strategy on Combating Illegal Exploitation and Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora in Africa. In collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNOCA will continue to support subregional efforts to identify collaborative approaches to address the issue.

90. While progress continues in the fight against LRA, the group continues to demonstrate its intention and capacity to conduct attacks against civilians in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The planned withdrawal of Ugandan forces from the African Union Regional Task Force will require redoubled commitment from national, regional and international stakeholders to ensure that LRA is not able to exploit the resulting gap. I urge all stakeholders to remain engaged politically, financially and militarily, including through the funding of humanitarian programmes in LRA-affected areas. I am grateful for the dedication and commitment displayed by the Ugandan forces, and by military personnel of the Task Force and contributing countries, for their continuing efforts and operations, which are crucial to ending the threat posed by LRA.

91. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of Central African countries, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force and troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to the service of peace and stability. I am grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support to UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support and cooperation with UNOCA.

92. In conclusion, I would like to express my deep appreciation to my outgoing Special Representative, Mr. Bathily, for his unwavering commitment, dedication and hard work during his term in office. I would also like to thank my Acting Special Representative, Mr. Fall, for having accepted this challenging assignment. I commend the staff of UNOCA for their continuing efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.